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ABSTRACT

As a result of the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act, a number of powers previously exercised at the central administration or board level have devolved upon the Local School Councils (LSCs) and principals. The cooperation of 14 representative schools was enlisted for an ongoing qualitative study of the dynamics of reform at the local level. To date, three reports have resulted from the study and these form the primary basis for this paper, in which LSC operations, principals' views of their changing roles, and an analysis of school improvement plans created by the sample schools are described. Attendance rates at LSC meetings varied greatly from council to council, and member participation seemed to depend on the topics being discussed. Principals saw their roles change in a primarily negative manner because of increased demands on their time and because some councils infringed upon powers legally mandated to principals. Positive comments from principals referred to increased discretion and flexibility as a result of school reform. On the average, LSCs discussed six topics per meeting and, in most cases, made decisions by votes that were the culmination of preceding discussion. Each of the 14 schools under observation adopted a school improvement plan during the spring of 1990, and virtually all the reform initiatives included within the plans were supported by current research on school improvement. Tables and graphs are included. (23 references) (EJS)

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Monitoring Authority Shifts in Chicago School Reform[1]

G. Alfred Hess, Jr. and John Q. Easton[2]
CHICAGO PANEL ON PUBLIC SCHOOL POLICY AND FINANCE

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CHICAGO PANEL ON PUBLIC SCHOOL POLICY AND FINANCE

In December 1988 Chicago embarked upon a grand experiment to improve the quality of its public schools when Governor James R. Thompson signed the Chicago School Reform Act (P.A. 85-1418).[3] The legislation contained three major elements: a list of goals which emphasize that Chicago students should be achieving at the national norms within five years, a limitation on non-instructional costs and a reallocation of funds towards the local school level, and the institution of school based management through the establishment of parent dominated Local School Councils at every school. The act explicitly states that it is the General Assembly's intent

> ...to make the individual local school the essential unit for educational governance and improvement and to establish a process for placing the primary responsibility for school governance and improvement in furtherance of such goals in the hands of parents, community residents, teachers, and the school principal at the school level. (P.A. 84-1418, Sec. 34-1.01.B).

To foster that intent, the General Assembly devolved to the school level a number of powers previously exercised solely at the central administration or board level. The Local School Councils (LSCs) were given three major powers: to adopt a school improvement plan, to adopt a school budget, and to select (and terminate) the principal to serve under a four year performance contract. In addition, principals were given the right to select all new educational staff who were to be employed in their schools without concern for seniority. The procedure for terminating unsatisfactory staff was eased. A number of other related decisions were also shifted to the school level.

However, a number of powers were explicitly reserved for centralized decision-making, decisions which in other school based management systems, such as in Great Britain

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[1] **Paper presented to the American Educational Research Association in Chicago, April 6, 1991.**

[2] The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of their colleagues to the research which is summarized here: Hilary Addington, Darryl Ford, Cheryl Johnson, Jesse Qualls, Susan Ryan, and Sandra Storey.

[3] This act was declared unconstitutional by the Illinois Supreme Court on November 30, 1990 because the method of electing members to Local School Councils violated the one person-one vote provisions of the federal constitution. On January 8, 1991, the Illinois General Assembly reenacted the legislation's main provisions (P.A. 86-1477).

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(Cf. Hess, 1991a), were also delegated to the school level. Many of these reserved decisions have direct impact upon decisions which might be made at the school level. Among the reserved decisions are the responsibility to negotiate and sign contracts with employee unions, to adopt a systemwide budget, to adopt a systemwide school reform plan, to determine enrollment patterns across the system, and to assure the continued implementation of desegregation programs operating under a consent decree with the federal government. In addition to all applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations, LSCs are required to act within the constraints of contracts signed by the central board and within the policies established on the basis of these various reserved powers. Thus, it is clear that local schools are not entirely free to do as they please in deciding how to manage their educational programs and facilities.

In this paper, we will attempt to describe the shifts in authority which have occurred under the initial implementation of the Chicago School Reform Act and will point to areas in which the locus of authority is currently in dispute. In addition, we will describe some decisions for which authority is not contested, but the impacts of which are seen by LSC members to be unfair and inappropriate.[4]

I. Monitoring and Researching the Effects of School Reform in Chicago

In early 1989 the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance designed a five year project to monitor the implementation of the Chicago School Reform Act and to do research on its impact on the public education available to the city's students. This project has been funded by the MacArthur Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, the Chicago Community Trust, the Woods Charitable Fund, the Field Foundation of Illinois, and the Fry Foundation.

As originally conceived, the design included eleven sub-projects in three broad areas:

School Governance	School Improvement Process	Outcomes of Reform
LSC Composition	Improvement Plans	Student Achievement
LSC Operation	Resource Allocation	Attendance/Graduation
Principal Contracts	Plan Implementation	Grade Retention
Personnel Changes		Teacher/Parent Attitudes

Another way to envision the various sub-projects included within the monitoring and research design was to see that some of these sub-projects entail huge systemwide statistical analyses while other augment those more comprehensive approaches with more intensive, site level qualitative studies of a limited number of schools.

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[4] For a fuller description of the Chicago School Reform Act, its history, and initial implementation, see Hess, 1991b.

A. Large Scale Quantitative Studies

The large scale, quantitative studies primarily focus on data already routinely collected by the Chicago Public Schools including such things as student test scores, dropout rates, grade retention rates, attendance rates, staffing and budget patterns, and characteristics of students and staff. Some new quantifiable data will be collected directly, such as surveys of the attitudes of teachers and parents. When the Panel first sought support for its monitoring and research efforts, it was virtually the only organization, outside of the Department of Research and Evaluation at the Board of Education, with the inclination and capacity to launch a comprehensive monitoring effort. Board staff were quick to lend their cooperation and support. Since that time, a wider research consortium has emerged, of which the Panel is an integral part, which will enable an even broader research effort. Tony Bryk (1991) will describe that effort shortly.

To date, the Panel's reports on the various sub-projects which entail large scale quantitative analyses have be primarily baseline reports which set the stage for later analyses of change. These reports, all available from the Panel, include an initial survey of teacher attitudes as reform was being launched (Easton, 1989a), a *Chicago Public Schools DataBook* for 1988-89 (Chicago Panel, 1990), a study of retention rates in June 1989 (Easton & Storey, 1990a), and a study of budget reallocations (Hess & Addington, 1991). In addition, the Panel continues to monitor the annual reports of dropouts produced by the Department of Research, Evaluation, and Planning of the Chicago Public Schools; these reports are built on the model established collaboratively by department staff and the Chicago Panel which led to the Panel's initial longitudinal study of dropping out in Chicago (Hess & Lauber, 1985). Recently we have released the results of a follow-up survey of graduates of the Class of 1989 (Storey & Qualls, 1991). This study showed what proportion of the graduates were in college and/or were employed. The report represents a baseline study of graduate preparation for higher education and employment; improvement in that preparation is a goal of the reform act.

We are currently in the process of producing a *DataBook* containing first year data for 1989-90 with changes from the original baseline data. We are approaching this task cautiously for several reasons. First, the data reflect the situation in schools towards the end of the first year of reform implementation, but it must be remembered that the first year was essentially a planning year. Any change that might be ascribed to the reform effort can only be that which occurred as a result of new resources allocated to the schools, outside help secured through the numerous volunteer efforts mounted by lawyers, accountants and businessmen to support school councils, or the enthusiasm generated at the local level as reform implementation was beginning. It would not be the result of new school improvement plans which would not yet have been implemented.

In addition, several technical problems have intruded in this year's data. The school system changed the form of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) that it would administer and the new form had not been equated with the previous form for accurate comparison.

Therefore, with the cooperation of the Department of Research, Evaluation, and Planning, the Center for School Improvement at the University of Chicago, and about 26 local schools, the Panel has undertaken an equating study to provide an intelligible score comparison. A second set of data included in the *DataBook* include scores from the Illinois Goal Assessment Program which tests students at third, fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades. However, since the cohort being tested differs each year, it is difficult to confidently assess changes from year to year at the school level.

The other significant quantifiable study we have undertaken was reported more extensively on Thursday (Hess & Addington, 1991). I will briefly summarize that report here. As a result of the Chicago School Reform Act, the budget of the Chicago Public Schools for the 1989-90 school year reduced the size of the central administrative bureaucracy by nearly 1,000 positions. The resulting savings of nearly $40 million was directed to local school budgets in line with a provision requiring the Board of Education to reallocate state funds intended to support the education of disadvantaged students. The law requires that these "State Chapter I Funds" be progressively targeted to schools on the basis of their low income enrollments (70 percent so targeted in 1989-90, 80 percent in 1990-91, etc.) and be increasingly available for discretionary spending by Local School Councils (20 percent in 1989-90, 40 percent in 1990-91, etc.). By 1993-94 the funds would be entirely distributed (except for five percent for systemwide desegregation purposes) to schools on the basis of low income enrollments and would be entirely available for discretionary spending by LSCs. Our analysis showed that the funds were moved in 1989-90 with the result that the average elementary school did have about $90,000 in new discretionary spending available to help implement reform. While an additional $90,000, on average, was projected to be available in the second year, the Board of Education reduced the teacher force by nearly 1,000 teachers in late 1989-90 and at the beginning of the 1990-91 school year. These teachers had been supported out of basic program funding provided by the Board of Education to schools, but were in excess of the requirements of the Board's contract with the Chicago Teachers Union. As a result of the Board's action cutting the base level of programs schools had previously received, many were forced to divert theoretically new discretionary funding to restore positions they had considered basic. Thus, the effect of the Board's actions was to dilute and diminish the second year reallocation effect. The Board took these actions as a budget balancing measure required to fund staff raises of about six percent. Thus, the central Board's contract decisions to increase the cost of staff significantly undercut the programmatic decision-making capacity of LSCs at the school level.

B. Qualitative Studies in 14 Representative Schools

During the first year of school reform, we set out to enlist a representative group of schools whose councils would allow themselves to be studied throughout the school reform effort. We wanted to be able to describe the dynamic of reform implementation at the local school level as well as to analyze changes in quantifiable measures of school resources and performance. We were able to secure the cooperation of 12 such schools during 1989-90

and have added two more during this year (Cf. Easton, *et al*., 1990). To date, three reports have resulted from this on-going qualitative study. They are the primary basis for the remainder of this paper. These reports describe the operations of LSCs (Easton & Storey, 1990b), principals' views of their changing roles (Ford, 1991), and an analysis of school improvement plans created by our sample schools (Ryan, 1991). We did produce one other smaller study, a report on our observations at 60 polling sites during the initial Local School Council elections in October 1989 (Easton, 1989b).

II. Authority Shifts under Chicago School Reform

Under the Chicago School Reform Act, Local School Councils were to become the primary site of school governance in Chicago. There has been considerable disagreement in the city, however, about what that entails. In addition, there are some, both within the school system and outside it, who believe this central aspect of the Chicago School Reform Act is a fundamental error which should be undermined, if not reversed. Thus, the first year of school reform could be described as a set of informal negotiations about how much authority Local School Councils now have and how much authority the central board and administration retain. These negotiations have not been conducted in comfortable conference rooms with representatives of the contestants gathered around tables. These negotiations have taken place in decisions of councils and of the board, in memos from the superintendent and in court decisions. Several of these major decisions need to be examined before proceeding to an analysis of how authority was exercised at the local school level.

We have already commented upon the contract and budget decisions of the central board and their effect upon LSCs and their improvement plans and budgets. There were two other sets of related decisions which impinged upon LSCs as they were first getting started. The very first decision LSCs faced, before they even elected officers, was where to meet. While this decision seems to have an obvious answer, in fact, this was not the case. The law requires LSCs to meet in a public place where their meetings can be observed by the public (LSCs are subject to the Illinois Open Meetings Act and to the Freedom of Information Act). However, under the terms of the Board of Education's contract with the operating engineers' union, schools could only be kept open free of charge for four nights a year, two of which are reserved for teacher-parent conferences on report card pickup days. The Board of Education informed LSCs that the central budget would not pay to keep schools open for LSC meetings, thus requiring LSCs to scramble to find other, free, public sites or to find the funds to pay to keep the school open. After much controversy, the Board did negotiate a change in the union contract which would allow the school to be open for two nights each month in exchange for compensatory time off for the engineers. However, for the first two months of the existence of LSCs, they were scurrying around spending part of their energy just trying to find places to meet.

Similarly, within weeks of their election, LSCs were informed that they had to adopt spending plans for the current year's State Chapter I funds. In a compromise with reform advocates, the board had allowed principals to determine the use of 25 percent of the new discretionary Chapter I funding prior to the LSC elections, but had reserved the decision on the use of the remainder of those funds to the LSCs. Because the Board of Education was required to report by December first to the State Board of Education on Chapter I use for the year, and because the State Board was unwilling to relax that reporting requirement during the first year of implementation,[5] the Chicago Board required LSCs to adopt a spending plan for those funds prior to December 1, 1989. This meant that LSCs had to devote several meetings, just as they were getting organized and before the members had had a chance to get to know one another, deciding upon the best use of fairly sizeable amounts of money. This was a considerable disruption in the intended pattern of reform in the first year, that LSCs would spend their initial months getting training and then doing an assessment of the needs of their school prior to exercising their three major responsibilities: adopting an improvement plan, adopting a budget, and selecting a principal. Instead, they were forced to make important budget decisions prior to receiving training and prior to conducting a needs assessment.

Two important decisions were made in court. On November 30, 1990, the Illinois Supreme Court announced its decision on a suit brought by the Chicago Principals Association. The suit had claimed that Local School Councils should not have the power to terminate any principals because to do so would be to violate their rights of tenure, which had been extended under previous legislation and rules and regulations of the Chicago Board of Education. In addition, the suit charged, LSCs were not properly elected under the requirements of the federal constitution's one person-one vote requirements; therefore, LSCs could not constitutionally act to strip principals of their employment or take any other significant action. This suit challenged one of the primary authority shifts mandated by the Chicago School Reform Act.

The Supreme Court agreed with the principals that LSCs were unconstitutionally elected. Further, they said, since the LSCs were the core of the reform legislation, the whole act must therefore be declared unconstitutional. But their opinion (Fumarolo, *et al.*, vs. Chicago Board of Education) was explicit in suggesting that the problem could be remedied and that the reform effort could be kept in place if the city or legislature would take corrective action. Assuming that such corrections would be forthcoming, the court then proceeded to address the question of tenure for the principals, in order to avoid having to rehear the case on that basis at a later time. Their ruling was unequivocal. Tenure was

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[5] Both the Chicago Board of Education and the State Board of Education were defendants in a suit brought by Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund which charged that they had conspired to allow the Chicago Board to illegally spend State Chapter I funds. The suit was based upon a report of the Chicago Panel (1988).

granted by state statute; it had not been incorporated in contracts with principals or their association; and tenure could be removed by state statute. Thus, the right of LSCs to terminate principals was upheld, if their own status could be corrected. On January 8, 1991, the Illinois General Assembly reenacted the Chicago School Reform Act with one major change (P.A. 86-1477). The election procedures incorporated in the original act were removed and provision was made for the mayor of the City of Chicago to appoint the currently sitting LSC members and the Board of Education. The new legislation also validated all past actions of LSCs and the Board of Education. A new election procedure must be adopted prior to July 1, 1991. Thus, school reform in Chicago proceeds as originally intended.

A. LSC Operations during the First Year of School Reform

LSCs are to be the essential unit of school governance and improvement under the Chicago School Reform Act. They are given broad powers to adopt a school improvement plan, to adopt a budget, and to select the school's principal. They are also charged to advise the principal and staff on curriculum, textbook selection, discipline and attendance. We found that, at various schools, these powers were exercised in different ways. In some schools, LSCs formally acted to make decisions which were not strictly within their purview under the law. In other schools, LSC decisions were hard to discern and frequently were little more than agreements with reports from the principal. In this section, we will analyze the shift in authority as our staff observed it in LSCs across the city.

Staff from the Chicago Panel observed council meetings for the second half of the school year in 14 schools--ten elementary and four high schools. Two of these schools did not formally agree to participate in the observational study until this year and they are not included in much of the ensuing analysis. These 14 schools are representative of the school system as a whole in terms of racial characteristics, size, and geographic location, but we do not claim that our observations can be automatically generalized to the system as a whole. We do hope that our data will illustrate the distinctive ways that different local school councils operated. We also hoped that the report on which much of this section is based (Easton & Storey, 1990b) would help council members evaluate the effectiveness of their own councils through a stimulated process of self-analysis.

We will examine who attended LSC meetings and who participated in the discussions of issues. We will examine what issues were discussed and with what frequency. We will look at the school improvement plans which were adopted to examine the extent of authority LSCs were appropriating for themselves. And we will examine how participants in this process, particularly principals, saw their roles changing under school reform.

1. Who Attended LSC Meetings?

As school reform was being debated in Chicago, there was some concern expressed that LSCs would not be able to function at many schools, particularly those in areas with

many low income families. There have been some reports of LSCs which have not been able to maintain a quorum at their meetings. None of the LSCs in our sample had this problem, though several did deal with the issue of non-attending members. In the elementary schools, the average attendance rate for LSC members was 70 percent. This translates into an average attendance of 8 of the 11 members.[6] In the high schools, attendance was somewhat higher at 78 percent, or eight or nine members per council. High schools also had non-voting student members elected by the student body. These students only attended about half the high school LSC meetings.

Attendance varied greatly from council to council, ranging from a high of 9.6 in average attendance to a low of 6.8 (six members present represented a quorum for most matters). Nine of the 12 LSCs had a core of at least half of the members who could be counted upon to be present at most meetings. Thus, at these schools, there was a continuity of discussion from meeting to meeting. Attendance also varied from member to member and among types of members. Principals attended nearly all meetings (97.3 percent--two of the 12 principals each missed one meeting). The chairpersons, who were all parents, and the teacher members attended 88 percent of the time. Community members (67.1 percent) and other parents (61.7 percent) averaged attending more than three out of five meetings.

Several LSCs were concerned about the lack of attendance of some of their members. About ten percent of parents who were not chairpersons and 21 percent of community members attended less than a quarter of all LSC meetings (most LSCs conducted regular monthly meetings with several additional special meetings). One LSC discussed the non-attendance of two of their members at nearly every meeting. Finally, after repeated failed efforts to reach these members, the LSC voted to ask the principal to write to these members to request their resignation. They also voted in support of an effort to amend the reform act to allow LSCs to remove non-attending members. One other LSC also wrote requesting the resignation of a non-attending member.

Members exercised their authority in different ways. Acting together, LSCs all adopted school improvement plans, adopted budgets, and selected principals. Across the system, all but 81 schools had adopted school improvement plans by the end of June 1990 and all but 40 had submitted budgets for 1990-91, according to the superintendent of schools (*Chicago Tribune*, August 15, 1990). As of mid-February of this year, 324 principals who were serving schools when the reform act was signed into law had been selected by their LSCs to continue in that role. That means some 203 schools (38.5 percent) will be served by principals who are new to their schools since reform was enacted. Only one of the schools in our sample selected a new principal. Systemwide, this was a significant change in the persons exercising newly expanded authority at the local school level.

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[6] LSC membership includes six parents, two community representatives, two teachers, and the principal. In high schools, a non-voting student member was also elected. The reform act required that the chairperson be one of the parent members.

Different members had different degrees of influence on decisions made by the LSCs. And different members participated more frequently on some topics than on others. As might be expected, principals participated more frequently than any other LSC members. Together, they addressed nearly two-thirds (66.3 percent) of all items discussed at LSC meetings during their first year. The chairpersons participated next most frequently (43.4 percent). Teachers participated 31.6 percent of the time, community members at 27.5 percent, and other parents spoke least frequently, to only 17.0 percent of discussed topics.

Table 1
Percent Participation in Topics Discussed

Topic category	Principal	Chair	Other Parents	Teachers	Community Members
School Program	82.0	33.8	18.8	28.9	25.2
LSC Org & Procedures	58.3	51.2	14.6	33.6	28.3
Building & Safety	74.2	51.6	20.3	34.7	34.4
Finance & Budget	76.5	37.3	13.8	31.0	27.5
Personnel	52.1	50.0	21.4	38.9	26.0
Parent & Community	25.0	40.0	14.0	22.5	20.5
Other	40.9	36.4	10.9	15.9	27.3
ALL TOPICS	66.3	43.4	17.0	31.6	27.5

Not only did different members participate in discussions at different rates, they participated on some topics more than on others, as might be expected. Principals spoke more frequently (more than 75 percent of the times these items were discussed) about the school program, building and safety matters, and issues of finance and budgeting. They rarely spoke on parent and community involvement and participated less frequently on the range of other topics which we did not classify. Participating at a generally lower level, LSC chairs spoke to about half the discussions of LSC organization and procedures, building and safety, and personnel. Other parents rarely spoke to any of the issues, though, on average,

at least one other parent spoke each time school programs, building and safety, and personnel were discussed. Teachers and community members spread their participation fairly evenly across all subjects.

Our analysis of these participation rates, when combined with our first hand observation, led us to the conclusion that principals frequently played the role of *information provider* to the LSC. Frequently, the items principals participated in started as items in the regular principal's report, an agenda item for virtually all regular LSC meetings. The chairpersons, who participated more evenly on the range of topics discussed, more frequently played the role of *facilitator*, helping the LSC to understand an issue or come to a decision. It is worth noting that the chairperson participated least frequently in School Program issues, the arena in which the principal participated most frequently. Other parents and teachers participated most often on personnel and building and safety issues. Interestingly, teachers participated less frequently on school program items than did these parents. Community members were most likely to be heard on building and safety issues and on LSC organizational matters, and less frequently on school programs.

2. *How Principals View Their Roles*

In addition to noting who participated on what items during LSC meetings, we wanted to analyze how principals saw changes in their own roles. The Chicago School Reform Act was built upon the conviction that an effective school would be led by an effective principal (Edmonds, 1979; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Still, it is obvious from the filing of the suit by the Chicago Principals Association that not all principals approached school reform enthusiastically. In fact, only six of the eleven retained principals in our original school sample identified changes in their role which they characterized as positive.[7]

Two principals cited the increased discretion/flexibility that they have as a result of school reform. One principal noted that she could get things done more quickly because she did not need approval from various layers of the bureaucracy. She also noted she could acquire better teachers for the school by conducting her own interviews and making her own selection based on merit, not seniority. She also liked the discretionary funds now available at her school. She put is this way.

> We were able to take State Chapter I money and allocate more money for books and supplies. We were able to allocate where we felt our needs were. And I've also written in four positions for summer school. We always have far more kids wanting to go to summer school than the board ever let us have.

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[7] Principal interviews were conducted during the spring of 1990. The analysis of those interviews, which forms the basis of this section of this paper, was conducted by Darryl Ford (1991).

Several principals commented on the additional assistance they receive under school reform. One commended the additional wisdom brought by LSC members and the advantage of making decisions collaboratively. He commented, "It's inconceivable to me that a lot of people are going to come together and agree on something that isn't for the benefit of the children." Another principal commented that reform had given him ten potential allies, but noted that the potential "ain't happened yet." Other principals commented upon the new assistance they were receiving from professionals and universities. Yet another principal commented upon the higher level of communications required by working with her LSC. She noted that she had always been a planner, but realized now that she had not always let others know what those plans were. She saw the new need to communicate as increasing the involvement of others.

Principals also appreciated the power they had to select staff. One commented,

> You might say that students have been better served because for the first time this year, when I had a vacancy, I didn't have to take the teacher [that] the Personnel Department sent me. I had a choice. I know of one case,...who I would have gotten, and I know that I made a better choice because this [other] teacher, the last seven schools he was in, every principal closed the whole....program just to get rid of him. That's how bad he was, and nobody wanted to go through due process because it was easier to close the program for a year and later reopen it.

Interestingly, there was no evidence in our sample schools of principals seeking to use the relaxed procedures for remediation and dismissal of unsatisfactory teachers. This is a new power principals have but appear not to have begun to utilize.

Some principals felt school reform had brought an increase in total power at the local school level. While others saw the power equation more as a zero sum game, one saw it somewhat differently:

> One of the things about the school reform act is that it stresses a sharing of power and hopefully we will be able to illustrate that through sharing, we all have more power. Rather than diminishing power that we all have, we increase it. We increase our ability to accomplish by sharing power. That's the great hope of reform...

However, overall, principals were more prone to make negative comments about changes in their roles under reform. The most common complaint was about time. One principal said,

> The only thing I worry about is time: time, time, time. It's amazing, these people get on one small topic and you can spend an hour on it. Then, when you think about the many things that we have to cover, it adds up. But the

> one thing I am fully committed to is spending all the time that I am asked to spend.

Another principal echoed that complaint, and reinforced the image of the principal as the information provider:

> The downside of school reform is that I just don't have enough time in my day. It's taken far more time. First of all, I'm spending a lot of time explaining to people who have no background knowledge. It's just time consuming. I'm not decrying it; it's just time consuming.

Other principals noted that the time demanded by the LSC elections and new activities related to council operations have entailed certain opportunity costs, particularly related to supervision and contact with other members of the faculty.

Another principal noted that she had taken on three new roles which she did not think appropriate. The first was that of being a Public Relations figure. She complained about the time she had to spend with parents on PR instead of doing her job. She suggested that if she did not spend a lot of time smiling at parents, her contract would not be renewed. Several other principals also mentioned the fears they had about LSCs misusing their powers to fire principals without good reason. This principal also complained that she had to spend time being a referee, trying to bring together two different factions in her school community. Finally, she was frustrated in that she felt like her post-reform role was primarily being a glorified clerk.

> But you know, this is becoming very frustrating because it seems like everything is falling on my shoulders--dealing with the parents, dealing with the local school council, dealing with the teachers, getting all of the reports done--and it's very frustrating....You know, I feel like a glorified clerk. You see what I'm saying, why I'm so frustrated--because that's all that I am, a glorified clerk.

One other principal, in commenting negatively about the way his council was operating, unknowingly revealed how some councils infringed upon the powers legally mandated to the principal. He complained,

> Here we are, we're interviewing four persons for the position of Child Welfare Attendant. *We* are interviewing. Now, I have to adjust to that. That is my problem with it. I just honestly feel that I'm in the better position to know which of those four should be in that position.

Interestingly, this principal is uncomfortable with the LSC being involved in personnel selection, but is apparently unaware that this function is really his prerogative, not the LSC's. However, it may be that this principal has been intimidated by the other members

of the LSC. Other principals were worried about LSC members exceeding their authority. One was particularly concerned that LSC members would not stick to policy issues, as Board of Education members are supposed to do, but would try to circumvent the principal to be directly involved in issues such as teacher evaluation, another responsibility clearly delegated to principals under the reform act.

Several principals commented on the new demands on them to work collaboratively with new groups of people, whether it be the LSC on budgeting or the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee on instructional matters. These cooperative efforts provide increased involvement, but are not as efficient as when the principals did things by themselves.

But some principals saw this expansion of authority at the local level less charitably. One principal complained that she possessed more responsibility for education, but had less help, the same salary, and her job on the line. She commented, "[We] have all this power, but on the other hand, we have a sword hanging over our heads." Another principal commented that she did not like the fact that two teachers would help to decide whether her contract would be renewed.

Nearly half of the principals echoed the concern about ultimate responsibility lying with the principal. Principals commented that "the final burden is on the principal" or "the ultimate responsibility is mine" or "let's face it, responsibility for this stuff really comes back basically to the principal." Still one principal expressed the relationship between the principal and the LSC a bit differently:

> The local school council is an oversight [authority] for the school--who operates through the principal. That's the kind of relationship we have--oversight committees or as liaisons, and they work through, not with.

3. What LSCs Discussed and Decided

On an average evening (LSCs usually met at night), six topics would be discussed. The most frequently discussed topics were those related to school programs. For those who were worried that LSCs would simply concern themselves with political wrangling and maneuvering to get relatives hired at the school, this finding gives reassurance about the forces set loose at the local school level and how the newly granted authority will be used. School program topics included issues of curriculum and instruction, school improvement planning, school administration, and overcrowding. The next most frequently discussed issues related to the LSC's own organization, its procedures and training. Relatively equal amounts of time were spent discussing building and safety topics, finance, and personnel. Least frequently discussed was the matter of parent involvement, and when it was, it was often in the form of an announcement about an upcoming event for parents. There were a number of other miscellaneous matters which came before LSCs infrequently. (See Table 2.)

Different councils focused on different issues, as might be expected. Some councils spent a great deal of time on school program issues while others spent almost no time on these central school concerns. Some councils were consumed with their own procedures and organization, while others operated with accepted routines which needed little discussion. Councils with low attendance tended to spend more time on organizational issues, including non-attending members. Councils with higher attendance tended to focus more directly on school program issues.

Table 2
Topics Discussed at LSC Meetings

Categories and Sub-topics	Percent of All Topics	Members Participating
School Program Topics	**28.5**	**3.2**
Curriculum and Instruction	12.4	3.1
School Improvement Planning	6.2	4.2
School Administration	7.3	2.2
Overcrowding	2.6	4.3
LSC Organizational Topics	**27.5**	**3.1**
LSC Procedures	19.3	3.1
LSC Training	8.2	3.0
Building, Security, & Safety Topics	**13.3**	**3.6**
School Infrastructure	3.4	2.8
Security, Safety & Discipline	9.9	3.8
Finance Topics	**10.9**	**3.0**
Finance and Budgeting	7.3	2.9
School Fund Raising	3.6	3.1
Personnel Topics	**10.7**	**3.4**
Principal Selection and Contract	6.0	3.9
Other Personnel	4.7	2.6
Parent and Community Involvement	**4.3**	**2.2**
Other	**4.7**	**2.2**

Some issues dominated the attention of some councils. One council focused on the fact that its school was severely overcrowded and discussed the issue at every one of its meetings. These meetings were well attended and had extensive participation among the LSC members and frequently included extensive participation by members of the audience.

The council members took a very active role in looking for new space and developing alternative plans to relieve the overcrowding. They were constantly frustrated by the difficulty they had in working with, and coming to agreement with, central office staff assigned to help solve this problem.

Another council focused on gang problems and eventually developed a dress code for students to try to overcome gang identification in clothing. When students at the school requested a meeting to discuss the issue, the LSC cooperated. Council members discussed their plans and then received comments from parents and students; they discussed with them the positive and negative aspects of adopting a school dress code.

The decision-making process of councils was more difficult to analyze. In most cases, decisions were made by votes which were the culmination of preceding discussion. Sometimes, the discussions were very brief followed by a quick, routine approval (for example, transferring funds from one line in the budget to another). On other occasions, such as when the school improvement plan was to be adopted, the discussions were long and protracted and the vote was far from routine.

But decisions were not always easy to determine. Councils used a range of procedures when they made decisions. Some councils did not require that motions be seconded. Voting mechanisms often varied, from roll call votes, to show of hands, to voice vote. Frequently it was difficult for our observers to tell how individual members had voted on particular issues. In a few instances, the only way an observer knew a decision had been made was the announcement of the chair that the motion had passed. In some cases, councils had a strong enough sense of consensus that they did not bother to formally vote. Interestingly, very few motions were defeated and most votes were very one-sided.

A little more than a quarter of all items discussed came to a vote. Since discussion topics included announcements and reports, this proportion seems appropriate. Budget items were more likely to culminate in a vote while those dealing with miscellaneous topics, parent and community involvement, and the school program were the least likely to have culminated in council decisions.

Table 3
LSC Topics Culminating in Decisions

Topic Category	Number Discussed	Number Voted Upon	Percent Voted Upon
School Program	133	29	21.8
LSC Organization	128	43	33.6
Building, Security, Safety	62	16	25.8
Budget	51	21	41.2
Personnel	50	18	36.0
Parent/Community Involvement	20	4	20.0
Other	22	3	13.6
TOTAL ALL TOPICS	466	134	28.8

4. What Improvements Are Planned?

Each of the 14 schools we were observing adopted a school improvement plan during the spring of 1990. Panel staff have undertaken an analysis of these plans to understand what schools intend to do to improve the quality of education they are offering their students.[8]

The Chicago School Reform Act mandates that each LSC will create a three year school improvement plan:

> A 3 year local school improvement plan shall be developed and implemented at each attendance center. This plan shall reflect the overriding purpose of the attendance center to improve educational quality. The local school principal shall develop a school improvement plan in consultation with the local school council, all categories of school staff, parents and community residents. Once the plan is developed and after the local school council has

[8] The summary presented in this section is built upon the data collected and analyzed by all school observers and drawn together into a report by Susan Ryan (1991).

approved the same, the principal shall be responsible for directing implementation of the plan, and the local school council shall monitor its implementation. After the termination of the initial 3 year plan, a new 3 year plan shall be developed and modified as appropriate on an annual basis.

The school improvement plan shall be designed to achieve priority goals including but not limited to:

(a) assuring that students achieve proficiency in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and critical thinking skills so that district averages equal or surpass national norms;

(b) assuring that students attend school regularly and graduate from school at such rates that the district average equals or surpasses national norms;

(c) assuring that students are adequately prepared for and aided in making a successful transition to further education and life experience;

(d) assuring that students are adequately prepared for and aided in making a successful transition to employment; and

(e) assuring that students are, to the maximum extent possible, provided with a common learning experience that is of high academic quality and that reflects high expectations for all students' capacities to learn. (P.A. 85-1418, Sec. 34-2.4).

The legislation then provides a list of important components which should be included in school improvement plans including a needs assessment, a list of objectives, the activities, staffing patterns, and training needed to reach the objectives, and a process for monitoring whether the objectives are being achieved.

School improvement plans in the 14 schools we have been observing varied widely. In three of the schools, the plans were rather cursory, with fewer than ten objectives set forth. None of these three schools made any plans to address the curriculum or instructional program of the school. The only school wide programs they addressed were related to improving attendance and student discipline. Only one sought to improve on the educational resource centers available to students (a high school seeking to open a math lab). About school organization, they made only minor suggestions which were essentially focused on adding time for students to work rather than any form of reorganization of their current resources.

By contrast, three other schools addressed changes in virtually every aspect of their curriculum, intend to create new learning resource centers for students, and envision rather extensive reorganization in the ways teachers interact with students, including team teaching and regrouping to foster cooperative learning. It is apparent, from reading these plans, that these school councils have much more extensive ideas about changes they want to see happen in their schools. It also seems obvious that, in these schools, teachers took a more active role in proposing changes which they thought would be beneficial to their students.

Two of these schools had been involved in a year long staff training and planning process under the system's desegreation programs. The third had employed professional, non-profit planning facilitators to assist them in creating their plan. The remaining eight schools in our sample seem to fall somewhere in between these extremes.

Table 4
Components of School Improvement Plans

	Elementary schools										High Schools			
REFORM INITIATIVE	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	W	X	Y	Z
CURRICULUM		+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+		+	+	
English												+	+	
Language Arts		+	+	+	+				+	+				
Math		+	+	+	+	+			+	+				
Social Science			+			+						+		
Science			+	+	+	+			+	+		+	+	
Arts			+	+	+	+	+		+	+			+	
Interdisciplinary			+	+	+					+		+	+	+
SCHOOL-WIDE PROGRAMS	+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Tutoring			+	+			+	+	+	+	+			
Mentoring									+					
Adopt-A-Student						+								+
Exchange									+					
Speakers														+
Incentives		+		+										
Attendance	+	+	+			+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Discipline	+	+	+			+		+	+		+	+	+	+
LABS/LEARNING CENTERS		+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	+
Study													+	
Reading/Research					+					+				
Reading				+	+		+		+				+	
Writing					+							+	+	
Science			+	+	+	+				+		+	+	
Write to Read		+												
Literature					+									
Math			+	+	+	+					+			
TEACHER SUPPORT	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Staff development		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Personnel	+	+		+	+	+		+	+	+			+	
Incentives				+		+		+	+			+		+
SCHOOL ORGANIZATION	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+			+	+
Team teaching			+	+										+
Lower class size		+	+	+		+	+	+	+					
Extended day	+			+		+								
Rotating teachers				+										
School within					+								+	
Time-on-task						+		+	+					
Cooperative learning			+	+					+					
Double period													+	
Grouping			+	+										
Walking reading				+		+				+				
PARENTS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+
Informational				+	+	+	+		+	+	+		+	+
Training	+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+			+	+
Volunteer			+	+	+	+			+	+			+	
Self-Help				+	+									
OUTSIDE AGENCIES	+		+		+	+	+		+	+	+			+

Note: This table shows which reform initiatives are contained in each of fourteen school improvement plans. The table divides the reform initiatives into seven major categories and several subcategories. The + marks indicate which initiatives each plan contains.

When we looked at the relationship between the needs assessments conducted by schools and the school improvement plans LSCs adopted, we again discovered great variance. In a number of schools, the needs assessments were quite detailed and carefully pointed out specific problems which needed to be remedied. Frequently, the school improvement plans then included quite specific approaches to attack those problems. However, in other schools virtually no needs assessment was completed. In several, the needs statements seemed to be simply a restatement of the goal arenas incorporated in the school reform act (the central office had supplied all LSCs with a school improvement planning guide which included planning pages for each arena included in the legislation). In these latter schools, the improvement steps were more cursory and seemed less likely to be realized.

As might be expected from Chicago style restructuring, there were many different approaches adopted in the 14 schools in our sample. One school decided to focus on boosting the self-esteem of its students as its major focus for improvement and therefore adopted an Afro-centric curriculum as the centerpiece of its reform. It intends to integrate that curriculum approach in all classrooms in the school. Other schools identified particular parts of their school program which were weak or in which students were not achieving as well as needed to meet national norms. They designed programs aimed at those specific problem areas. Still other schools saw their major problem in increasing attendance and focused on ways to get kids into school, while paying little attention to improving what these students would encounter when they did attend.

We were pleasantly surprised to discover that, with one exception, virtually all of the initiatives included within the 14 school improvement plans were well supported by current research on school improvement. There was some interest, in some schools, in moving towards cooperative learning and the general approaches included under the heading "student as learner." In many schools there was a focus on increasing time on task. There was an attention to moving beyond simply using basal readers to include literature and, in several schools, the Junior Great Books approach, to move students towards an enjoyment of reading. It must be remembered that it has only been a few years since all Chicago classrooms were forced to use Chicago's peculiar form of mastery learning which concentrated almost exclusively on sub-components of reading and the use of workbooks, so that the movement back to basal readers in 1985 was a major step. Many schools now seem ready to take the next step. The single exception to this alignment with current theories in school improvement was one school which unapologetically decided to adopt homogeneous grouping of students to facilitate instruction. This unabashed tracking plan flies in the face of most research demonstrating the harmful effects it has on students labelled as the slow learners (Oakes, 1985; Rosenbaum, 1980; Slavin, 1978).

When we move back from the specific analysis of individual school plans, we must concur with staff from the school system's central office that these plans are not likely to create radical change in most of the schools we studied. They rely more upon adding on

small increments than upon making radical changes. Central office staff who analyzed plans from across the system put their assessment this way:

> Most school improvement plans stick to traditional methods of instruction, relying on a good basal reader or textbook supplemented by workbooks and seatwork. More than one-fourth of the schools place major emphasis on remediation, extra study, or tutorial time for students below grade level or identified as at risk of failure.
>
> Evidence of innovation, in the sense of a sharp change of direction or the adoption of a wholly new approach, is rare in the plans. Far more of the schools, it seems, prefer to do more of what they are already doing or to do that better. Incremental change is what is seen, not uprooting and replanting.
>
> Nevertheless, the plans promise more change in the 1990-1991 school year than Chicago's public schools have seen in a long time. (Chicago Public Schools, 1990:2).

This same concern was expressed by two other sometime observers of the Chicago school reform implementation. Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Stephen K. Clements (1990) , on the basis of their experience with four schools, wrote an article in the school reform journal, *Catalyst*, entitled "Complacency could blow `grand opportunity'". After declaring that "School reform in Chicago is off to an encouraging start in terms of structure, process, and community energy..." they offered the following caution:

> What concerns us is whether this new system, once fully born, will be able to put into place a radically altered educational vision, a profoundly different set of ideas about teaching and learning, school organization and process, curriculum and pedagogy, student assessment and parent participation (Finn & Clements, 1990).

On the basis of our examination of school improvement plans adopted at 14 schools, we have a similar concern. In three of the schools, fairly significant changes have been planned. In three others, the plans seem pedestrian exercises. In the majority of schools, the plans call for more of the same, in educational programming. That is probably not radical enough to create the kind of change Finn and Clements think is necessary. But it may be the necessary developmental step to later plans which are more radical. Only time and further observation will determine if that potential is realized.

III. Discussion

The Chicago School Reform Act is a major effort to realign authority and decision making in a major urban school system. An explicit goal of the act is "...to make the individual local school the essential unity for educational governance and improvement..." (P.A. 85-1418, Sec. 34-1.01.B). The first year of implementation was the year in which most of the shifts in authority were to take place. We have tried to present an accurate picture of the new decision-making pattern which is now in place.

School based management and shared decision making mean different things in different systems in which they have been utilized. In some school systems, with an orientation towards enhancing teacher professionalization, the emphasis has been upon sharing decision making among the professionals at various levels of the school system. Parents may also participate in that sharing of authority. New powers are not necessarily devolved downwards in the system.

Chicago's school based management reforms, which might be better characterized as client empowerment, involve both devolving authority from higher levels of the hierarchy to the school level *and* expanding the participation of parents, community residents, and teachers in making those decisions at the school level. It is a vertical movement of authority down the hierarchy and a horizontal extension of authority at the school level.

There are undeniable new arenas for decision-making being exercised at the local school level. Schools have chosen their educational leaders and signed them to four year performance contracts. In the process, they have chosen to dismiss some principals or to encourage others to retire. It is this latter aspect of the principal selection process which is really new to Chicago school communities. In the past, when a new principal was to be appointed to a local school, a search committee, composed of parents and teachers, was created, interviewed candidates, and chose three in rank order of preference. In most cases, the first choice was appointed to the school by the general superintendent. Though it was not always the case that schools got their choice, for the most part it was the ability to change principals which was the new authority being exercised by LSCs. The fact that LSCs could make their own choice is an important element in the new process, but represents a smaller increase in authority than the ability to change principals.

Similarly, the ability of local school personnel to select teachers and other educational staff on the basis of merit rather than seniority was a welcome change for school principals. However, as we have demonstrated, in some schools there were some differences in who exercised that authority at the local level. The legislation indicates that staff selection is a responsibility of the principal. Whether through the desire for broader participation by the principal or through intimidation by the council, in some schools, LSC members were participating in the staff hiring process.

It is also undeniable that there is a new outpouring of energy and enthusiasm directed towards planning for school improvement among the members of the local school communities. Whether exercised perfunctorily or engaged in with extensive training over a prolonged period of time, the process of creating a local school improvement plan has mobilized more intense involvement in trying to change Chicago public schools than at any time in the system's post-war history. Sustaining that interest and involvement will be a major challenge for reform activists during the next several years of implementing the legislation. Similarly, enabling local school improvement planners to envision scenarios for more radical educational change will be an important component of efforts to translate authority shifts into improved educational opportunities for the city's school children.

However, it must be noted that LSCs are experiencing frustrations in exercising their new authority because of decisions being made by the Board of Education and the school system's administration. Decisions about the system's budget and its contracts with its employee unions are properly the responsibility of the Board of Education. But major changes in the terms of those contracts and in elements in the budget during the first year of implementation have changed the conditions under which LSCs were planning. Dramatically increasing the compensation of teachers and other personnel has forced the system to reduce the number of employees employed at local schools to be able to fund the raises. The decision to reduce the number of employees, rather than to redistribute them equitably as the legislation had anticipated, has forced LSCs to divert their projected discretionary spending to maintain program efforts they had considered as part of their basic program.

Similarly, the central administration's refusal to reexamine the functions of central office personnel in any significant fashion has left LSC members frustrated with the inadequate level of support they are receiving as they seek to deal with difficult problems such as overcrowding. The Board of Education's compromise decision to experiment with three different sub-district arrangements in order to provide support services to schools has further complicated the decision-making at the school level. A whole set of specific problems have arisen over which the central administration and individual LSCs disagree as to who has the authority to determine a resolution. These tussles develop over regulations which are imposed without prior notice and have spawned calls for establishing a formal rule-making procedure similar to that utilized by the State Board of Education when it seeks to create rules and regulations which have an impact upon local school districts.

Still, with all the uncertainty and continued "negotiation" on some issues, it is clear that major new decision-making authority has been devolved from the central office and Board, authority which is now being exercised at the local school level. Similarly, it is clear that many new actors are now participating in exercising that local authority. In the schools we studied, the primary participants in most of the discussions leading up to local decisions were the principal, the LSC Chair, the two teacher representatives, and the two community representatives. Other parents on the LSC participated less frequently, yet it seems obvious

from the fact that most votes were nearly unanimous, this does not mean those parents were uninvolved or ignored. It is, perhaps, important to note that the near unanimity on most matters is an indication that the various constituencies on the Local School Councils are working collaboratively on behalf of their schools, at least at the schools we have been studying. Since the willingness of parents and teachers to work collaboratively was one of the major concerns expressed by some critics of the Chicago reform effort, that is a significant finding for the first year of implementation.

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